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Love And Love Of One's Fatherland: Aspects Of Patriotic 'Ex-Istences' In Sean O'Faolain's Short Story "The Patriot"

Christelle Chaussinand

1 Most Irish writers of Sean O'Faolain's generation were involved with national issues during the first three decades of this century, but only a few (among them Daniel Corkery, Sean O'Casey, Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor) responded as fervently as he did to these political, social and cultural upheavals.

2 In this way, the successive episodes of the 1916 Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War are central in *Midsummer Night Madness*, O'Faolain's first collection of stories, published in 1932. However, as the personal always predominates over the factual in his fiction, these events are of interest to the storyteller essentially because they allow him to probe the conflicting stresses of communal and individual strivings, of national insurrection and private rebellion, ofcollective idealism and intimate disillusionment. The rebel-stories in *Midsummer Night Madness* therefore present the gruesome attrition of the freedom-fighters: their initial steadfast and elated faith in the Rebellion succumbing to solitude, hunger and the terror foisted on them by the Black and Tans ("Fugue", "The Patriot"), or succumbing to the ugliness of wartime brutality ("Midsummer Night Madness", "The Small Lady", "The Death of Stevey Long"); then, their progressive realisation of the disorganisation and pointless fanaticism of the rebel leaders, of the absence of a programme of national emancipation and progress, and of petty political manoeuvring; finally, their acrid disillusionment facing the chaos of the Republican cause, the reality of brotherfighting against brother in the Civil War, and the ultimate dismay in the country. Besides, each story deals more or less explicitly with the same theme: the value of patriotism and its personal implications. Indeed, like O'Casey in *The Shadow of a Gunman* and *The Plough and the Stars*, like Frank O'Connor in his collection *Guests of the Nation* or Liam O'Flaherty in *Insurrection*, O'Faolain repeatedly states these

challenging and quite harrowing questions: to what extent is one prepared to sacrifice oneself and people one loves for a cause? What price — especially emotional — can reasonably be paid for the sake of one's ideals? When does patriotism become 'non-patriotism' — that is, where is the limit between the keen defence of national dignity and fanaticism which cuts the patriots from the very people they fight for, leading them to odious actions? Is there a contradiction between political loyalties and human relationships?

3 "The Patriot", the last story in *Midsummer Night Madness*, most strikingly epitomises these questions. The plot is based on the technique of counterpoint and deals with the existential and moral conflict experienced by a young rebel between the world of his patriotic commitment and the world of his personal feelings; or as Richard Bonaccorso puts it, with 'the conflict between self-restriction brought about by fear [and disillusionment] and the contrary craving for personal freedom'.[1] At variance with "Fugue", or O'Connor's similar story "September Dawn", both presenting young irregulars who cope with the nerve-racking hazards of war although they yearn for human warmth and comfort, the wearing out of the rebel's revolutionary impetus and of his patriotic idealism — in the face of both adverse circumstances and the prospect of love — is carried through in "The Patriot" as the young man finally deserts.

4 The story centres on two antithetical characters: Bernie, a member of the Irish Irregulars during the Civil War; Edward Bradley, a former teacher of his and a passionate political orator, supporting the nationalistic cause. It also centres on the counterpoint development of Bernie's attraction to Bradley — as the symbol of the patriotic struggle — and to Norah — his beloved and the representative of personal desire.

5 The central action hinges round Bernie's being progressively depressed with guerrilla life, the constant flight, the hunger, the cold, and the everyday fear of being arrested or killed by the Free State forces. His desire to give up grows stronger every day, especially when his political commitment is put in balance with his love for Norah and the time he spent with her in Youghal. As the setting of their flowering love and happiness, the small sea-side town becomes a universal point of reference for Bernie: being kept away from that one place full of personal associations means being exiled and cut off from an essential part of himself. Nonetheless, the ache of exile and inner splitting is not at once fully perceived. Under the pressure of rebel-life, Bernie first seems to lose touch with normal life completely, becoming thoughtless of home, of his friends and Norah. He is somehow de-humanised, reaching a state where he is reduced to his bare instincts like an animal, 'wander[ing] among the grey mountains to the north of Youghal, as aimlessly, and he used to feel more uselessly, than a lost sheep'.[2] It is a letter from Norah which — 'without the slightest warning, as suddenly as the breaking of a thunder-shower' (p. 148) — makes Bernie's physical and emotional displacement conscious. Bringing memories back to his mind, this letter leads the young rebel to juxtapose his present condition with the days in Youghal with Norah ; it makes him painfully appreciate his situation as a man on the run, 'the slow attrition, the wearing of the spirit, the despair of the heart, the stripping of the nerves'.[3] The awareness of the opposition between the hostility of his present environment and the congeniality of faraway Youghal hits him like a sledge hammer. In contrast with Norah's melancholy, yet highly poetical, evocation of thecolours of autumnal Youghal, Bernie's perception of his immediate surroundings becomes obsessionally dark: his serene, sensual enjoyment of the coming of night on Youghal woods has been replaced by his fear of a rainy night on 'the cold and naked

mountains', resounding with thousands of spooky sounds: 'He could hear the streams swirling down the dark leaca and as he listened, their roar mingled terror with the desolation of the black silence' (pp. 147-9). A 'sedge of broken reeds (...) washed ashore by the storms [that reminds] Bernie of the sedge of sea-wrack on the foreshore across Youghal bay' is a source of distress, as it enhances 'the pitchy darkness' of the surrounding moorland and makes his exile even more real (pp. 153-4).

6 In this way, Bernie's patriotic stance is soon superseded by personal preoccupations: 'Thinking of that [how lovely Youghal had been] and thinking of the summer his memory began to work on him like a goad' (p. 148); 'he made up his mind that he must at all costs go back into the city out of these bleak mountains (...). If he could rest for a while and see Norah, he would become invigorated by her and be of some use again' (p. 152). In other words, love which had been first eclipsed by Bernie's love for his fatherland becomes indispensable again, including as a support for his revolutionary ardour. However, a surge of true patriotism pushes Bernie first to try and seek reassurance and encouragement from Bradley, whom he meets in a hotel where the rebels have momentarily established their headquarters. But Bradley's political faith and charisma fail to boost the young man's spirits and to push him back into the struggle. Moreover, this short stay in the hotel is an occasion for Bernie to become aware of the general state of chaos among the Irregulars. The men fighting among the hills are not the only ones to be

> weak and scabby and sore, not a penny in their pockets, not a pipeful to smoke, nothing to do from one week to the other but run when danger approach[es], never together, badly led, beaten all but in name.[4] (p. 154)

7 In the hotel too, the young man meets 'a hopeless sort of army', an undisciplined and disintegrating faction of ill-clothed, ill-fed but heavily drinking soldiers (pp. 150-6).[5] By this stage, Bernie's action as a rebel is irremediably impaired; his endurance is defeated and any further commitment with the Republican army is suspended and made impossible. Significantly enough, the young man falls asleep when asked to guard the outer door of the room where a meeting is held by a group of rebel-officers; leaving the room, the latter 'poke his stomach with their boots in mockery' of him, a gesture which strikingly underscores Bernie's demotion as a rebel-fighter (p. 155).

8 Contrary to Bernie's, Bradley's commitment to the nationalistic cause remains intact in spite of the passing of time, difficulties, defeats or general demobilisation. Even after the dissolution of the Irregulars in the last days of the Civil War, Bradley still fiercely campaigns for the nationalistic tenets that he has always supported. In this way, when Bernie and Norah return to Youghal for their honeymoon, their orator-friend gives another speech on behalf of *Sinn Fein.* Moreover, unlike Bernie, Bradley's revolutionary passion is not deflected by personal feelings: the old man's own perceptible attraction to Norah is not so strong as to 'cool the passion in him to which he had given his life' (p. 162); almost completely detached from human bonds, he devotes himself to his political ideals exclusively.

9 Altogether, and although they are contrapuntal, both Bradley's and Bernie's attitudes underscore an absolute antinomy between love and the love of one's fatherland. Indeed, as patriots, both Bradley and Bernie — although this is only a temporary stance for the latter — identify completely with their fatherland and sacrifice their own desire to the patriotic cause. They subordinate their spontaneous inclinations (directed towards love and human bonds in general) to their 'ego-ideal' (directed towards such abstract concepts

as the Land, the Fatherland, the National Pride, etc.).[6] Accordingly, as a subject, Bradley is immobilised; he is totally encapsulated, 'islanded' in his status as a patriot, and a necessary link is established between his being a patriot and his being a bachelor (p. 162). Similarly, as long as he is immersed in guerrilla warfare, Bernie becomes 'forgetful of [Norah and] the sweetness of their early summer and autumn love' (p. 159). In his case, the absolute abandon to his patriotic duty even results in an devitalising or devouring symbiosis with his natural environment. Here in fact, at a deeper level, another primordial battle is opposing two female instances : Norah as the wife to-be and Ireland as the mother-country. Actually, Bertie's indifference to Norah takes the form of so utter a de-humanisation that he progressively merges into the vegetable kingdom, being gradually 'enveloped by the countryside as if he were a twig, a stone, an ear of corn' (p. 148). Ireland swallows up the young man ; he is engulfed by his 's-*mother*-ing' country. Altogether, Bertie's virtually unlimited patriotic passion is thus literally and thoroughly '*self-consuming*', consuming the self : he enters a state of *non-désir* — that is, nearly a state of *non-vivre*: 'the days scarcely existed for him and the weeks flew over his head as unnoticed as birds homing at night, until as a human being he almost ceased to be' (p. 148).

10 Now, if they both illustrate the anathema between love and love for one's fatherland, there is a fundamental difference between the elder and the younger patriot. Bradley's love for his fatherland is proliferating. His life is filled with revolutionary passion: from the outset, he is thus presented as 'a *firebrand* leading all the young men into *wild* politics' (p. 145 — italics mine). Nothing — in particular, no woman like Norah — could come in the place of the patriotic attachment to which he devotes his entire life:

> The years between that night and the day in the market-place had not dulled his eloquence, and though his temples were gone quite white now — premature for his years — the *terrible passion* of the man *blazed like the fire* of *burning* youth. (...) The hedges would race past him; the rabbits skip before his headlights on the road; the moths in the cool wind would fly around his *flushed face* and his *trembling hands*. But that wind would not for many miles cool the passion in him to which he had given his life. (pp. 161-2 — italics mine)

11 On the contrary, Bernie's passion for his fatherland is soon undermined by his attraction to Norah; it vacillates and is called into question in the face of love. This fundamental dissimilarity between the two characters is patent when they meet in the hotel and have a brief, private conversation about Norah. Bradley considers the young woman from a pragmatic point of view in direct relation with the Revolution: she is intelligent; her house was often a secure hiding place for him. On the contrary, as he is now aware of his love for the young woman and considers her as 'a secret part of himself' (p. 154), Bernie is blind to Bradley's fundamental detachment and yields to jealousy. His body, which had become numb when he was fully engrossed in guerrilla actions, is spurred alive again and even viscerally revolutionised: 'Bernie shivered, his blood turning over in his body, but it was not from the cold' (p. 154). Clearly enough, this physical revolution heralds another revolution — a reversal in terms of plot and of the characters' respective positions: the young rebel no longer regards Bradley as his mentor in political matters but as his rival in Norah's heart; their relationship thus switches suddenly and definitively from shared, communal motivations to discordant, personal strivings. [7]

12 At this stage, one may point to the fact that, because Bradley's patriotic passion is unique and absolute, because his mind is not split in two between conflicting loyalties, the old man does not appear like a 'tragic' character. He is un-*falt*-ering because his passion is

*fault*less. By contrast, precisely because love threatens and finally saps his identification with his fatherland, Bernie becomes a 'tragic' character. Symptomatically, it is at the very moment when Norah's letter reaches its destination — when Bernie is re-introduced to the order of love — that the young man's commitment to the Civil War takes on a tragic dimension.[8] Indeed, the words from his beloved, describing domestic life, lead him to question the wisdom and validity of his patriotic volunteering. In other words, as soon as he 'exists' again as a *desiring* human being, aware of the abnormality of his current situation and involved again in interpersonal relationships, Bernie necessarily 'ex-ists' as a rebel-patriot — that is, he is de-centred from, rendered 'ex-centric' to, his initial commitment. Or to state it differently, he is literally and figuratively "ex-patriated": the battlefield suddenly becomes a foreign, even hostile space for him; he becomes a stranger to the nationalistic cause. Several episodes connote Bernie's tragic drift and incremental sense of alienation. In the first place, Bernie's flight from the Black and Tans patrols, his arrest with two other fellow-fighters, 'shivering with fear and excitement — broken, timid as children' (p. 159), and his ultimate imprisonment, all point to a growing process of victimisation.[9] Likewise, the young man's taking shelter in 'a dump that had been made in a cleft between the rocks, a grave-like place dug out of the earth and covered with a sheet of corrugated tin and hidden by stones and withered brushwood' amounts to a metaphorical burial (p. 158). Finally, there is Bernie's 'existential dispossession'. In fact, the next time he happens to pass by Youghal — now a prisoner in rags and no longer 'an Irregular guerrilla' inflated by the glory of being 'doubly a rebel' (p. 145) —, nothing looks the same at all and Bernie feels dispossessed of his own life, estranged from what he has known best and loved most. More than that, the place seems so remote from him that it is almost unreal. It is as though this place belonged to another spatio-temporal dimension or was pure fiction:

> Never did anything seem so definitively past to him as [Youghal] and his summer flirting under those trees. It might have happened to him in another life, it might have been something he read of in a novel, so distant did it seem. (p. 159)

13 Similarly, when in prison, Bernie feels an outcast from life experiencing 'that worst torment of all prisoners — to think what lovely things life could have given him, too, had he been out in the world and part of it' (pp. 159-60). Of course, Bernie feels freed from the tragic order when Norah ultimately joins him. Indeed, as he fully re-integrates the world of love and is re-united with his beloved, it seems to him that he is self-possessed again and thus can easily yield to the charm of Youghal.

14 The freedom that Bernie acquires with Norah — or believes he acquires — is most ambiguous and delusional, though. Of course, contrary to Bradley who sacrifices everything to his narrow political passion and is *de facto* kept away from the world of human relationships, Bernie seems 'more human'. However, by fulfilling the dominant demands of his own self, Bernie proves disloyal to his duties as a rebel-fighter. Consequently, his alternative devotion to love amounts to an act of treachery towards his country: he changes his faith in national emancipation for a cause that is centred on his self. Furthermore, Bernie's withdrawal from the struggle may also represent another kind of regression — namely, a refusal to confront life with its normal string of hazards and setbacks; a virtual capitulation in front of reality. Strikingly enough, when Bernie decides that he wants to back away from the battlefield, it is not just his revolutionary action which is cancelled; he also loses his dynamism entirely, abandons himself to circumstances and becomes utterly passive. Even what he desires most — to go back home to Norah — proves as daunting to him as carrying on as an IRA gunman:

> Bernie *had not the courage to face* the refusal of a loan [to help him on the road home] so he asked instead for cigarettes. (p. 151)
> Bernie *did not have the energy* to tell him that all this [the Irregulars' army] was so much utter foolery. (p. 152)
> Bernie found he *had lost courage to attempt* the journey home. Tomorrow, he would go, he thought ... (p. 158) (italics mine)

15 Bernie's patriotic treachery and evasion from reality are both later confirmed when he escapes with Norah from the *Sinn Fein* meeting; doing so, he deliberately obliterates the chaotic and objectionable state of post-revolutionary Ireland for the sake of love: 'As by one thought, [Bernie and Norah] moved quietly out through the cheering crowd into the darkness' (p. 162). Bernie's indifference to everything that does not contribute to the recreation of the growth and intensity of his feeling even heralds a slip into an imaginary realm: the young couple's boundless delight in the romanticised Youghal scenery (the happy, off-season peace and silence of the town; the miles of deserted sand; the movements of birds; the newly-born lambs; the soft descent of night; etc.) represents a climax in fantasy. Bernie is intoxicated by love and thereby, he desperately — though delusively — attempts to gather to himself ever more instances of comforting sameness, self-replication and fulfilment. In this respect, there is not only regression from the communal to the personal, but from the romanticism of the Revolution to the myth of love. In this respect, Bernie and Norah's pilgrimage to the seaside town suggests a sort of religion of personality — or at least a devotion to it — as implied by the opening paragraph of the story:

> It was doubtless because of the inevitable desire of man to recapture the past that they went to Youghal for their honeymoon. Their friends expected them to go at least to Dublin, if not to London or Paris, but they both knew in their hearts that they had spent the gayest days of their lives in this little town, and so as if to crown all those early happinesses to Youghal they went, like true voluptuaries deliberately creating fresh memories that would torment them when they were old. (p. 144)[10]

16 To reinforce this impression of regression from the communal to the personal and from reality to fantasy, the young couple's blossoming love is ultimately set in the enclosed space of a hotel room which is in total darkness. Bernie's final gesture of pulling the blinds, as Bradley drives off 'into the country' (p. 162), adds to this telling image and takes on a symbolical value with regard to the dialectic of love and patriotism which is at the core of the story. In perspective with a series of binary oppositions — outside vs. inside; open space vs. enclosure ; far-reaching headlights vs. unlit bedside lamp, etc. — Bernie's present freedom as a lover (and a civilian) appears as the exact opposite of the freedom that he initially fought for as a rebel-patriot. The latter was progressive and dignifying in the sense that it was altruistic, and aimed at the future and at reform ; his new freedom is inversely regressive because it is self-orientated and because it is synonymous with recapturing the past, returning to what is well known and, as such, supposedly safe.[11]

17 However, the meaning of the epilogue may prove more complex, if not more ambiguous, than that. Indeed, if Bernie's new freedom is set in the narrow space of a dark hotel room, Bradley is also ultimately described driving off 'into the dark night' (p. 162). O'Faolain thus seems somehow to balance the positive and negative consequences of his characters' existential choices. This final note even suggests that, for the storyteller, both the extremes which Bernie and Bradley represent — respectively extreme patriotic demobilisation and extreme patriotic commitment — lead to a form of blindness and "ex-centricity": a blindness and "ex-centricity" to the course of history in Bernie's case and a blindness and "ex-centricity" to human beings in Bradley's case.

18 Owing to the time when it was written and to its strongly autobiographical dimension, such a mixed conclusion to "The Patriot" is not surprising. Balance in moral judgement undoubtedly hints at the storyteller's qualms about his own commitment in the war of independence and the Civil War. Indeed, in the 1930s, O'Faolain was not detached from his material and was really in a spirit of disillusioned revolt after the shattering of his dreams: 'I began life as a dreaming, romantic revolutionary and fell flat on my ass, betrayed both by Ireland and the Empire, both of which I had been prepared, at different periods, to adore.'[12] In *Vive Moi !*, he even qualifies his experience as a freedom fighter as '[his] encounter with the Absurd'.[13] Symptoms of O'Faolain's 'dis-bloody-illusionment'[14] about his love for his fatherland and faith in the nationalistic cause can be traced in many works of this period which directly or indirectly have the Irish revolution and its sequels as a historical setting. They show in the portrayal of such characters as Stevey Long, a young Irregular officer who appears in two stories in *Midsummer Night Madness* (the title–story and "The Death of Stevey Long") and whose disloyal and despicable cruelty recalls that of Gypo Nolan, O'Flaherty's informer. They show in the suggested reversal of attitudes towards mortal enemies in "Midsummer Night Madness", "The Small Lady" or in the later story "Lord and Master".[15] They show in the portrayal of such characters as Larry Dunne who, in the storyteller's words, 'are broken into fragments by the world' — in fact, by their past as IRA gunmen.[16] To give but one more example, they show in the restless wandering of Frankie Hannafey who discovers himself as a misfit everywhere he goes because of his once absolute dedication to abstract nationalism (*Come Back to Erin*). On the whole, in those works, O'Faolain repeatedly underlined the gap between revolutionary heroics and the reality of violence; like O'Casey in *The Plough and the Stars*, he constantly objected to the substitution of social and metaphysical abstractions to individual realities; finally but not least, he firmly railed against those nationalistic extremists whose defiled ideals led to the second-rate 'Free State' which he satirised in such stories as "Sullivan's Trousers".

19 Altogether and as a conclusion, in its counterpointing of heart and fatherland, the story "The Patriot" is reminiscent of the counterpointing of 'stream' and 'stone' — the first indicative of the flood of natural life, the other of fanaticism — in Yeats's famous poem "Easter 1916":

> Hearts with one purpose alone
> Through summer and winter seem
> Enchanted to a stone
> To trouble the living stream. (...)
> Too long a sacrifice
> Can make a stone of the heart.
> O when may it suffice? [17]

NOTES

1. Bonaccorso Richard, Sean O'Faolain's Irish Vision, p. 13

2. "The Patriot", Midsummer Night Madness, in Collected Stories, Vol.1, pp. 147-8. Page numbers will hereafter be given in the text after the quotations.

3. O'Faolain, Sean, Come Back to Erin, p. 62

4. The remark that the Irish freedom-fighters are 'beaten all but in name' is ironically contradicted by the fact that none of Bernie's fellows in misfortune is ever named. They are all referred to, and individualised, thanks to their physical characteristics — 'the man with walrus teeth' or 'Buckteeth' (p. 150), 'the fellow with a potato nose' (p. 152), 'the tall bespectacled fellow' (p. 154) —; thanks to their functions in the rebel army — the quartermaster —; or else thanks to their origins — the 'Kerry lad' or 'Kerry' (p. 158). This strikingly underscores the de-humanising dimension that is inherent in guerrilla life despite the supreme ideals of freedom and dignity that initially set men fighting.

5. The portrait that O'Faolain paints of the Irregulars in the hotel scenes is appalling: such details as money drooping out of the drunk quartermaster's pockets, the men draining the dregs of porter in the glasses left over from the night meeting of officers, a Kerry lad in tears with no overcoat or socks and his feet torn by the bare leather of his boots, etc., give the impression of a collapsing army. It is as though the storyteller were indirectly trying to give grounds for Bernie's desertion.

6. The following comment by O'Faolain helps to measure how crucial the relation between the 'ego-ideal' and fatherland can be: 'I hate to have to say [this] but it is true — we are a conquered people. We are a conquered people. We are not defeated, we are not defeated, we hung on by our toenails, but we are conquered' ('What it Means to Be Irish', Sunday Independent, 18 March 1984).

7. In many respects, Bradley is a paternal figure for Bernie. It is thus not surprising that the young man's loss of faith in his old friend-patriot should herald his loss of faith in the cause of his fatherland.

8. Significantly enough, it is a woman who shatters Bernie's identification with his fatherland. Norah's letter is disruptive because it is, in two ways, alien to Bernie's present circumstances: not only the sender is a female whereas Bernie lives in an exclusively male world, but the letter is also sent from the civilian world whereas Bernie fights on the front with guerrilla men.

9. This image of three men arrested by 'a score of sturdy green-clad riflemen' and 'shivering with excitement and fear — broken, timid as children' certainly echoes the description of the men in the hills 'weak and scabby and sore, (...) beaten all but in name' (italics mine) (p. 154).

10. If one considers that Bernie is the hero of the story, the title chosen by O'Faolain seems rather ironical. In fact, Bernie is not a 'patriot' in the sense that is commonly accepted: he proves less patriotic to Ireland, his fatherland, than to Youghal, the place which is the repository of all his personal emotions. Edward Bradley is the real patriot.

11. As Conor Cruise O'Brien suggests in the chapter he wrote on O'Faolain in Maria Cross, his comparative study of several catholic writers, "The Patriot" may be interpreted as an illustration of O'Faolain's 'parnellism' which may be defined as 'the association of national, spiritual and sexual emancipation' ("The Parnellism of Sean O'Faolain", in Maria Cross: Imaginative Patterns in a Group of Modern Catholic Writers, London: Burns and Oates, 1963, p.95). Indeed, like the old Fenians in A Nest of Simple Folk (Leo Donnel) and Bird Alone (Philip Crane), Bradley is a figure of national and spiritual emancipation. On the contrary, Bernie's emancipation is more ambiguous: nationally and spiritually speaking, he is only temporarily dignified by his fight for his fatherland; sexually speaking, his choosing Norah seems like a withdrawal rather than like an opening.

12. Sean O'Faolain cited by Julia O'Faolain in 'Sean at Eighty', p. 20.

13. O'Faolain, Sean, Vive Moi!, p. 171.

14. This term is O'Faolain's creation. He uses it in two short stories at least: "No Country for Old Men" and "Before the Daystar".

15. A similar vacillation of loyalties is depicted in Frank O'Connor's story "Guests of the Nation", in which Bonaparte and Noble — two IRA members — are forced to shoot two British prisoners with whom they have become friends.
16. "The End of a Good Man", Teresa, in Collected Stories, Vol.1, p. 394.
17. Yeats, William Butler, *Yeats's Poems*, London: Papermac, 1989, p. 288.

ABSTRACTS

Sean O'Faolain's story " The Patriot " deals with the value of patriotism and its personal implications. The plot is situated in the context of the Civil
War and hinges on the counterpoint development of the two main protagonists : Bernie, a young rebel-fighter in the Irish Irregulars and Bradley, a passionate political orator supporting the nationalistic cause. Bernie is tragically split between his love for his fatherland and his love for Norah ; ultimately, his patriotic commitment is defeated by personal feelings. On the contrary, Bradley's nationalistic idealism is overwhelming and cancels any other passion, in particular love. Altogether, the experiences of both characters show that there is an anathema between love and patriotic love, that such passions are mutually exclusive. Besides, the characters' positions both suggest that extremism in such matters may lead to a form of existential " ex-centricity " : Bernie's political demobilisation and absolute devotion to love mean " ex-centricity " to the course of history ; Bradley's patriotic fanaticism means " ex-centricity " to interpersonal relationships.

La nouvelle " The Patriot " de Sean O'Faolain aborde la question de la valeur du patriotisme et de ses incidences sur le plan personnel. L'intrigue présente l'évolution en contre-point de deux personnages engagés dans la Guerre Civile : Bernie, jeune rebelle comptant pami les Irish Irregulars ; Bradley, défenseur passionné de la cause nationaliste irlandaise. Bernie est tragiquement partagé entre l'amour qu'il voue à sa patrie et l'amour qu'il voue à Norah ; finalement, ses sentiments personnels l'emportent sur son engagement politique. À l'inverse, l'idéalisme nationaliste de Bradley est envahissant et bloque inéluctablement toute autre forme de passion, notamment l'amour. Ainsi, l'expérience de chacun des deux personnages montre qu'amour et amour de la patrie sont antinomiques, que de telles passions s'excluent mutuellement. De plus, la position extrême adoptée par chacun d'eux semble être la cause de leur " ex-centricité " : la démobilisation de Bernie et son " repli " sur l'amour le rendent " ex-centrique " au devenir historique ; le fanatisme politique de Bradley le rend " ex-centrique " à au jeu normal des relations interpersonnelles.

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